



State of Connecticut
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Testimony in Support of Raised House Bill 5178
Public Safety and Security Committee
February 22, 2022

Chairs Horn and Osten, Vice Chair Paolillo, Ranking Members Howard and Champagne, and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, we thank the Committee for raising House Bill Number 5178: An Act Expanding the CRISIS Initiative Pilot Program Throughout the State.

This proposal would expand the CRISIS Pilot program, currently in Troops D & E, to the entire state. The Connection to Recovery Through Intervention, Support & Initiating Services programs (CRISIS program) was originally launched in 2017 by New London County's State Police Troop E with support from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DHMAS). Local police departments have access to this program as well, which also includes Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) certification to our state troopers. This additional training gives our state and local police officers advanced situation de-escalation tactics for calls related to mental health, overdose, and substance abuse related incidents. There is also a DHMAS clinician currently assigned to Troop E who responds to these calls when they are on duty. In 2021, CRISIS was expanded into the Troop D region where several local departments have also signed onto this program. The clinicians in this region have been supported from United Services and has already demonstrated a great deal of promise in the short time CRISIS has been expanded into this region.

The CIT creates a safer environment both for our police officers, as well as for the individuals they are helping. Oftentimes, calls that deal with opioid and substance abuse result in an intervention by mental health professionals instead of an arrest. When officers are responding to calls, on patrol, or are conducting community-oriented policing and someone reaches out for help, they have the ability to take down information and generate a referral to a CRISIS mental health professional. This makes it easier for police to do their jobs and get people into the mental health pipeline as well as being able to identify the most afflicted. This is a proactive step that, if taken, could save lives. The clinician completes related paperwork with the hospital making the process easier for the hospital staff to respond quickly. Furthermore, the clinician puts together a long-term treatment plan for the individual and follows proper follow-up procedures with family and clients.

From May 2017 through the end of 2021, 600 people have been referred to a clinician through CRISIS. Out of the 600 referrals over 80% had follow ups. The eastern portion of the state has been disproportionately hit hard by the opioid crisis. However, it is not confined to just this region of the state. The CRISIS initiative has not only been very effective in addressing this mental health epidemic but has also brought together state and local law enforcement, mental health professionals, and the broader community.

We would like to see the success of the CRISIS program expanded state-wide, but to do so will require additional financial resources. However, we believe that this is an effective policy change that will address the most critical public safety issues that the country, and our state, faces today. We thank the committee for raising HB 5178: An Act Expanding the CRISIS Initiative Pilot Program Throughout the State. We look forward to answering any questions you may have.